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With Heavenly Help

A Short Autobiography and a Richly-Earned Expression of Gratitude

by Miriam Eisenstein-Drachler

The night storm Sandy was raging forcefully – and -- wrathfully, I found myself standing at the window in my room at the Belle Harbor Manor observing, both faithfully as well as fearfully, the unstoppable rise of the waters. “Mother nature is out of control,” I murmured to myself. “May the Almighty, the Creator of mother nature, help us in this hour of need!”

By association my psyche took me back to January 1935, the time we were heading on a Polish boat to the shores of the United States of America, ‘the golden land,’ to rejoin our father, Rabbi Simon Eisenstein of blessed memory, who emigrated from the Polish shtetl Jasionowka, near the better-known city of Bialystok – several years before us. I relive the contradicting emotions of that day – joy, hope and promise on the one hand; fear of the unknown, on the other hand...And the Atlantic Ocean is raging on....

The sights and sounds of the night of our departure from the shtetl come back to me and resonate and envelop my whole being! I hear my grandmother Soreh of blessed memory lamenting in Yiddish: “Oy Vay, men nemt mentchen un men beit zay oys oy briv.” – Alas, you exchange human beings for letters, oy vay, alas, alas!”... My grandmother could not read or write, so what good would letters do.

Uncle Yosel, considered the wise member of the family to whom one turns for advice and guidance, instructs us along the following lines:

- Join hands. Stay together. America is not Jasionowka. You are about to start out on a long journey to a distant land. Take care of each other at all times, and don't forget to write us.

The town's people surround our wagon and call out the names and locations of their relatives now residing in the United States.

“We need help. We need support. We love them.”

Little did we realize as we were leaving Jasionowka that a storm of evil and barbarism would soon engulf our extended family, millions of lives in Poland and all over Europe. And the why? why? why? -- will never be answered...perhaps in this post-Holocaust period we should probe in depth *the nature of human nature*. In our age of speeding technology this is especially significant.

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Back to the reality of storm Sandy. It hits the Belle Harbor Manor ferociously. The waters have invaded the first floor. We are advised that we are being evacuated immediately. We are being taken to the Armory in Brooklyn.

At the Armory, we are greeted with courtesy, gentleness and goodness beyond description. I am writing these lines after being here two weeks. A new level of selflessness, combined with a very high level of care, has opened up to us. The staff and all the volunteers who have come from near and far, epitomize love, caring and serving. Such questions as: "Is there anything you need?" "What can I do for you?" are constantly heard throughout the day and even during the night. The prevailing climate makes one feel more secure and very, very grateful.

It is with feelings of gratitude and love that I dedicate this article to all the men and women who run this magnificent, heart-warming place known as the Armory of Brooklyn.

May you go from strength to still great strength in your magnificent, all-inclusive pattern of selfless dedication and help to other selves.

May the world outside these walls incorporate the outstanding dynamics of the Armory in its daily flow of human interaction.

This, I believe, is the basic need of the present. May it be realized in society-at-large.